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# Seeing the trouble: A mountain rescue training scenario in its circumstantial and situated detail in three frames

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## INTRODUCTION

This article concerns the possibility and adequacy of ethnographic description in relation to the circumstantial ‘order-productive’ detail of a given scene (MacBeth, 2012). The scene is an incident of technical trouble that emerges in the course of a mountain rescue training scenario. I take this case as instructive as to the relationship between ‘live’ observations and their detail, and that made available in photographic and video materials. I show how the trouble, in its occasioned detail, is oriented to in different ways, and is differently available in different viewings and ‘representations’ of the scene and its action. Analyses of the trouble’s technical detail are also shown to be instructive for discovering members’ concerns, and for the analysis to aid members’ in discovering their concerns too (Garfinkel, 2002).

In what follows, I outline something of the ethnomethodological treatment of observation, fieldnotes and video materials. In doing so, I locate this article within a growing corpus of work concerned with the collaborative and praxiological accomplishment of perception-in-action and with members’ orientations and interpretations of the saliency of phenomena shown in video. The majority of the article describes the mountain rescue training scenario and specifically *members’* own analysis of the situation. I offer some remarks on what might constitute ‘adequate detail’ and ‘adequate completeness’ and the availability of phenomena and order for description to those involved in the production of their lived detail (MacBeth, 2012). In summary, this case demonstrates how instructed viewings provide for a chiasmatically reflexive, instead of hierarchical, understanding of the status of materials and *in situ* observation.

## POSSIBLE OBSERVATIONS AND SEEING THE PHENOMENA

To put things perhaps too crudely, the central difference between what we might call Anthropological ethnography and ethnomethodology is captured by the resource/topic distinction. For ethnographers, the observation and the telling is the thing, in that the

telling provides for a *sense*, if told convincingly enough (Lemert, 2003) of how a place *could* be, or that things *could* have been organised this way. That sense, however, is built to serve as giving access to (perhaps through ‘thick description,’)<sup>1</sup> something else that exists as a ‘higher’ order (of inequality, of culture, of urban society, of global society, of digital society, and so on). In doing so, ethnographic accounts rely upon, rather than explicate natural language competencies, including categorisational practices (Dennis, 2019; Watson, 2015). For ethnomethodological inquiries, the observed phenomena and their detail are the thing, and in a quite different sense. The observation is the phenomenon of inquiry, and any observation and its possibility can be topicalised in terms of its availability as an ‘observable’ in just that way, in just that context, with just those details. As Sacks (1995: 89) has it, a scene is an assembled activity, and the ways in which that scene is assembled by members can be analysed, rather than only reported. Indeed, Sacks (1995: 27) remarked that the Chicago ethnographies were the only sociology worth criticising, because they contained the ‘this and that’ of everyday life. The critique, for Sacks, turned on both the unexamined use of categories by the observer/ethnographer (see Watson, 2015) and that the reader did not have access to as much information as the author, and could not reproduce the analysis. This can be taken simply and programmatically in terms of the availability of fieldnotes and research materials to the reader for ‘verification’. We might also however consider the relationship of those materials to the observed scene, and how and whether the detail of any given scene is available to those involved in its production in such a way that they can be written down in order to be read by another. How did you cross the road this morning? How was that queue organised as you waited for your coffee? How was the flow of traffic that you joined on the motorway ordered on the move? The answers to such questions live in the details of the scene, rather than in efforts to exploit those details to provide an answer from elsewhere.

MacBeth’s (2012) notes on the play of pick-up basketball make available the ‘circumstantial detail’ of the scene as that scene’s detail, and particularly as pick-up basketball’s detail to those familiar with pick-up basketball. A reader of those notes, perhaps trained in Anthropological ethnography, might well argue that those notes are little more than what a good ethnographic account should look like. Not so far, perhaps, from what Atkinson (2017) has called ‘granular ethnography’. Yet, one might also see that they are a very good ethnographic account, *because* they are an account produced in the service of the detail of the scene and not some other external concern or answer or priority or topic for which those notes are enlisted to represent. Mere description is hard, so hard that formal-analysis recurrently steps in to remedy the shortcoming of mere description, to ‘fill in’ or ‘complete’ the scene, to reveal that which cannot be seen: which is to falsify it (Wittgenstein, 1953). Whatever can be seen, is put there to be seen, accountably so (Sharrock, 1995; McHoul, 2017). Whatever might be construed, formally, as ‘culture’ or

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<sup>1</sup> On ‘thick’ in Clifford Geertz’s use, Garfinkel (2002: 166) remarks: ‘Examine “thick” as academically privileged, interpretive, cultural, so that by reason of its constituencies has not need to know what it is talking about’.

‘structure’ and so on is yielded, can only be yielded, by the local practices that make up the detail of the scene in which ‘structure’ and so on has presence (MacBeth, 2012).

In more specialised scenes, such as labs, courtrooms, aircraft cockpits, it might well be difficult for the neophyte or external auditor to see what the members are up to. This does not mean that the details are hidden from view. Rather that they are unavailable for description. The problem is one of natural language, and turns on scenes and observations conceived of as a *Gestalt*, as assembled activities, as kaleidoscopic singularities (Watson, 2015), as a decomposable whole whose parts have (sometimes very technical) names (Gurwitsch, 1948; Sacks, 1995). Something of this matter is, of course, addressed by Garfinkel’s (2002; with Wieder, 1992) programmatic insistence on the unique adequacy requirement—that is, that an observer or analyst must gain at least a ‘vulgar competency’ in an activity or scene in order to be able to access its detail. Suffice to say, in my early experiences of attempting to observe and document specialised practices in the work of mountain rescue, I was sometimes left with little to write. With rope work of the sort described below, I found myself with a particular and curious sort of blindness that seemed to emerge from a conflict between my knowledge of rope work as a climber being attemptedly ported to the viewing of mountain rescue rope systems. This is no invention. The instructors would say ‘forget what you know’ or ‘stop doing things like a climber’. It turns out that ‘vulgar competencies’ are highly situationally specific.

As MacBeth (2012: 197) puts it ‘...to find a practice, it can be helpful to solicit the testimony of a practitioner’. Note the ‘can be’. In such testimonies, does the *just what* of the local detail of a scene remain elusive? ‘What more’ of the detail of pick-up basketball, or of mountain rescue work, is there? What might be accessed by using other means, such as video? Is the testimony enough? And what might ‘enough’ mean in any case?

## THE SITE MAKES US GREEDY

The troubles of accessing the detail of a scene turn both on adequately accessing them and adequately documenting them. Garfinkel—sat with David Sudnow in an undergraduate chemistry lecture theatre at UCLA, pen and pad in hand—was frustrated by the capturing of the sequentially ordered production-detail of structuring the occasion *as* a lecture and *as* university specific work. Garfinkel describes how fieldnote materials were inadequate for accessing the ‘goldmine’ of the setting. His conclusion was that the fieldnotes would *not* do and that video materials were indispensable for the kinds of inquiries he aimed to develop. Garfinkel refers to how Sacks and colleagues had demonstrated the significance of inspectably detailed, reviewable, materials made possible by the tape recorder which provided the analyst with details that they could be sure of (Sacks, 1995 [I]: 622).

Yet, to leave the discussion there is to reproduce an entirely unhelpful dichotomy between the fieldnotes written by an observer who, to greater or lesser degree, participates in a scene in order to write about it (Emerson et al, 2011), and the visual and audio materials produced by the video camera neutrally capturing and preserving the scene

for later viewings. The incomplete and inadequate fieldnotes on the one hand and the faithful record of the camera ‘just grinding’ on the other.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, there is an increasing fetishisation of what more and more detail can provide to the analyst. At the same time, the dichotomy between the sketchy fieldnote and the detailed (multi-angled, 360°, 4K, and so on) video is widely and readily disavowed by all sorts of ‘qualitative researchers’ who would set about dissolving it by stating that the video is *also* incomplete, and is just as much a construction, if not even more so, as the fieldnotes, that there is no such thing as a neutral record, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

The point that both directions of travel seem to pass is that written accounts and videos can be and *are* routinely treated as complete and as a ‘record’ of events, but that they are accomplished as such in very particular practices in particular contexts (Watson, 2018). In this way, such viewings of materials are not ‘wrong’ or ‘naïve’ but are perspicuous settings for methodological inquiries of a different sort. In describing his interest in the formatted queue as a perspicuous setting, Garfinkel (2002: 255) further remarks on a locatively reflexive relationship between observation and recording and analysis:

The site makes me greedy. I grouch about the lack of money for multiple photographic versions. Not that multiple views are needed to make an argument that’s good once and for all. Rather, the views freeze what is going on so that the work of examining them in seeable series in these still frames provides what to look at and look for at the lived scene again. I’m thinking I’ll use the filmic rendering and instructions with which to get access to what instead of filmic detail is actually and not supposedly the case.

Garfinkel goes on to write that if he can’t ‘do the recording job with photographs’, he’ll use the ‘crazy circles with noses’ that Livingston (see 1987) uses. Garfinkel’s point is that the form of representation doesn’t matter so very much:

it might as well be nutty. Because you would not dare to read it off the page to decide its adequacy. You have no choice. You must take the drawing to that scene. There you use the drawing to start watching what the drawing affords in readable instructions is watchably the case.

Visual records are thus instructive for ‘animating’ the viewing of the scene. In keeping with the ethnomethodological reworking of the linguistic notion of indexicality, there is a reflexive rather than correspondent relation between the video and the phenomena of

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<sup>2</sup> I have borrowed this phrasing from a rather heated published debate between Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead (1977) on whether the camera and its products are a scientific or artistic object. There is more to say here regarding the ‘artistic’ and ‘scientific’ modes of representation and their situated accomplishment as such in various contexts. The work of the Forensic Architecture group is instructive in this regard <https://forensic-architecture.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> See McIvenny (2020) for an important recent discussion of the affordances of contemporary video technologies.

interest. Phenomena are not constituted ‘in the data’ or even ‘in the interpretation of the data’ in the social constructionist sense, but *in situ*.

Garfinkel’s search for detail (or Sacks’, for that matter) should not be misunderstood as a form of crude empiricism. Garfinkel is not after ‘the correct’ viewing, but a *possible* viewing of the setting in which the lived detail of that setting’s work and staff can be discovered. The viewing of video materials thus instructs toward the organisational things themselves, not in order to describe the things in a more and more detailed way, but to come to see detail as organised, socially and locally, in particular ways that ‘animate’ further inquiries. There are, of course, many things to be seen in any given materials, and many ways of seeing them. Ethnomethodological studies have long understood such interpretive differences as perspicuous settings for the work of sense making and reasoning and so on, as demonstrated in Pollner’s classic analysis of ‘conflicting’ accounts given in traffic courts and the negotiation of ‘reality puzzles’ yielded by the scene, as well as more recent studies of the organisation of ‘interpretive flexibility’ of video materials (Watson, 2018; Mair et al, 2012, 2013).

Such interpretive difficulties when it comes to the viewing of video materials has been perspicuous for ethnomethodological concerns with natural language, reasoning practices, and sense making within specific context, as well as the organisation of visually available order more generally, and the specific organisation of whatever the activity being studied happens to be. Indeed, other studies have specifically focused on interpretive troubles as a means of accessing the ways in which members produce and negotiate ‘interpretive asymmetries’, mis-seings, and alternative instructions for what should and could be seen in a video (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1997; Livingston, 1987; Watson, 2018).

In an analysis, particularly relevant for the current article, Mair et al (2012; 2013) analyse different interpretations of an incident of friendly-fire and what they call ‘interpretive asymmetry’. They demonstrate how inquiries that followed the incident irrevocably relied upon, and resorted to, natural language. As the latter article demonstrates in particular, a trouble arises in the ways in which language was assumed to operate in the same way in different settings and in different activities. Thus the ‘seeing’ of the phenomena in the video was organised differently in the military inquiry and the coroner’s court, not in terms of what the activities that could be seen were, but, rather, how those activities and actions might be characterised and assessed in terms of wider repercussions (Mair et al, 2013: 80). The authors consider how these analyses demonstrate a common concern with what they call the ‘structural properties of the context of action’. Such an approach that treats of the activities observable in the video in terms of what could and should have happened, and how the incident might have been prevented, is contrasted with the attention to natural language and the sequential unfolding of the event as it takes place *within* the cockpit and in the communications between the pilots and ground control. Significantly, the view from ‘within’ the ongoing flow of activities demonstrates a rather different flow of events than that offered by the video. The analytic troubles potentially introduced by video materials are well summarised by Mair et al (2013: 80):

Taking the cockpit video at face-value is liable to mislead someone using it to understand what the pilots are doing... The video camera that captured the pilots' actions is too easily recast as a dutiful, hard-working empiricist, a technological agent that, in carefully documenting the true character of events, allows us at second-hand to adopt the position of 'the universal observer', someone who has access to everything that was going on and so can take the 'god-view' when assessing it.

The particular case described in this paper is perspicuous for concerns relating to the possibility of in situ observation by a 'participant observer' and the 'role' of video materials in seeing or recovering the detail of the scene. For Anthropologists and Sociologists, the term means something like; the observations and a report made from the 'perspective' of a person taking part in some activity or 'belonging' to some group who, nonetheless, retains, where possible, the sensibility of an auditor of that culture. In an ethnomethodological sense, however, the ethnographer does not 'join' the congregation from outside, but, rather, it is the congregation that gives presence to its members, individuals, and groups and so on within the scene. There is no clear division between 'native' and 'observer' (Sharrock and Anderson, 1982). Observers are members, members are participant observers of their own circumstance. This is further complicated by the understanding that the members are not necessarily 'aware of the water', and that "methods" should not be understood as either belonging to, are being 'used' by 'individuals' (see e.g., Liberman, 2019). These are intriguing issues, and it seems that our sites make us greedy. Increasingly often, that greed services the pursuit of more and more detail, for detail's sake.

In what follows I address some of these issues in describing how different viewings of a single event provide for an inquiry in to 'what really happened' and 'what the trouble was' by members of a mountain rescue team. I am a participant in the scene in a number of senses, and became a member of the team in 2017, recently qualifying as a Full Team Member. The scene in question was recorded by fieldnote, and by GoPro camera. It was also captured in still photos by another member of the mountain rescue team, not for formal 'research' purposes but for a record, nonetheless, to be shared among the team.

## PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND SEEING THE TROUBLE

The trouble with which this paper is concerned occurs during a technical skills training session. 'Technical' refers here to rope systems used to lower (and sometimes raise) team members, and often a stretcher, to casualties located on steep and vertical ground. The general quarry venue is familiar to the team, but the specific site of the event was chosen by instructors with the specific intention to train and test members' ability to 'see' suitable anchors in an area visited for the first time (a study in its own right). 'Anchors' is a generic term for any feature in a location from which the team can attach and build a rope system to safely perform the lower over a 'crag' edge. 'Anchors' as a categorisation device gathers up features including cracks or 'flakes' in rock faces, large boulders or trees, or

fence posts or pillars of some sort around which a ‘sling’ or rope might be passed. Often-times, smaller anchors will be used simultaneously and built in to a single system, equalised by running the rope between them. Individually weak, they support each other in providing adequate resistance to the potential loads produced by team members, stretcher, and casualty.

One standard system for performing a ‘lower’ of a team member has a ‘main’ and ‘safety’ rope. These are practical designations in terms of how the system is operated—the ‘main’ line takes the load being lowered, with the ‘safety’ line remaining very slightly slack. The system is ideally built on symmetrical anchors of equal strength and trustworthiness but, in the case of one being ‘bomber’ and one not quite so strong, the main line will be attached to the side of the bomber anchor. The system is operated by two belayers, and is designed to have total redundancy; the extreme case scenario often (only half-jokingly) referred to is a lightning strike simultaneously hitting the belayers responsible for handling the rope. In such a case, the system will lock and any potential falling of the load will be arrested.

The lowering works not through the strength of an individual, but via the rope being correctly run through a belay device (either a ‘bug’ or ‘figure of 8’)—at an angle adjusted by the belayer—over ‘teeth’ or ‘fins’ (in the case of the bug) or the looping of the rope (in the case of the figure of 8) that introduces friction, and through a prusik knot. Nothing more than a thin piece of cord, tied in a double fisherman’s knot to produce a loop, the prusik is the component that provides the redundancy against the rope running at speed through the system. The loop is wrapped around the main rope three or four times, looped through itself, and attached by karabiner (krab) to a fixed point in the anchor end of the rope (produced by tying an overhand figure of 8 in it). The prusik knot is managed by the belayer, allowing the rope to run through it, and through the belay device, thus lowering the ‘rope-man’ or ‘rescuer’ on the other end. If for whatever reason—that lightning strike, perhaps—the belayer lets go of the rope and the prusik knot, the knot will be loaded, and will tightly bind around the main rope causing the system to ‘brake’ with easily enough capacity to hold body weight (for heavier loads a mechanical device will be used instead).

The system is remarkably uniform, or, rather it is accomplished as uniform and recurrent in any single instance in which it is built, *mutatis mutandis*. The subsequently available uniformity of the ‘standard’ system provides not only for safety, but for the ready inspectability of the system by any member. New members are drilled repeatedly in setting the standard system and in adapting the system to different situations. In my ‘Foundation’ cohort we spent no small amount of our own time practising the set up and—in a way relevant for this article—learning to display those efforts and learning to see those of others, providing not only a kind of community confirmation of individual practice, but an education in coming to see accuracy and mistakes in others’ work; a key component of the co-management of risk and safety in the work of mountain rescue. One such shot, taken from our cohort group messaging app, is shown below.





Figure 1: *The system: displaying vulgar competency, learning critique*

The image above may likely appear as a mess of rope and metal accessories to an unfamiliar viewer. A member, however, can discover their membership in the way the parts are discernible as ‘parts with names’, how their relation to one another is not a technical mystery, and in how the system’s ‘gestalt’ in that viewing, is viewable in specific terms of what system this is and what it is to be used for [a double anchor system, equalised with a ‘BFK ‘ (big fat knot), set up for a ‘personal abseil ‘, with the safety line toward the top of the image, and the ‘live’ rope at the bottom, running to the abseiler (and their own safety equipment just visible in shot)]. From *that* viewing, small technical assessments and complaints can emerge: [it is rigged a little untidily. The sling connecting the figure 8 belay device to the anchoring karabiners is very long and could have been halved (there is some degree of personal preference here, but better too long than too short as a loading of the system can cause the figure 8 to pull too close to anchoring krab)], [attention has been paid to orientation of the krabs (the pair are ‘spine to lock’, facing ‘uphill’, the screw locks are off the ground where possible, the krab securing the figure 8 is allowing for movement of the angle of the rope as the abseil progresses)]. Yet, this viewing does not become possible through the repeated viewing of images such as this, perhaps with parts labelled. This is a ‘docile object’ (Garfinkel, 2002: 180) which yields only an abstracted sense of what the facticity of things such as these might be in any actual occasion of their use. It is not enough to be able to name the parts. To talk the talk. Members know the system represented in the image through situated viewings of the parts and the whole *in operation*, of the system shifting when loaded, how the prusik will move, how the placing of each element begins to make sense in relation to one another in and as this rope system as mountain rescue’s rope system. Like Helen’s kitchen, the arrangements make sense in use, and components are arranged specifically for *just that* use (Garfinkel, 2002: 212-216).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Garfinkel describes visual impairment as a perspicuous setting. Specifically, he discusses the arrangements of kitchen implements and utensils on the wall of the kitchen of a visually impaired student, Helen. The ‘meaning’ of the arrangement is available in and through Helen’s making of a cup of tea, not through anything that someone might say or describe about the arrangement itself.

In this sense, the system's work is a 'congregation' that yields and gives presence to the categories of its staff, its structure, its order (Garfinkel, 2002). Two 'belayers' will be 'on the ropes', a 'rescuer' or 'rope-man' will be lowered or will abseil. An 'edge-man' will be employed, secured to a fixed rope. They will make their way to the edge of the crag and provide a visual link and communications between the rescuer and belayers, relaying instructions 'lower', 'hold', 'steady'. The coordination of the activities of the categories of staff of the system might be said to be achieved 'multi-modally', through the resource of lexical and non-lexical tokens, the feel of the weight of the rope, the friction at the prusik, held surprisingly lightly between thumb and fingers, and the speed [not as a measure, but more as a potential, for things to be starting to go too fast, of beginning to have the quality of being not-quite-in-full-control] of the rope running through the system. To maintain the safety of the rescuer tied in to the other end, the belayer must ensure sufficient friction in the belay device and pay attention to ensure that there is no slack building up in the system beyond the very limited amount required in the operation of the safety rope that should not be actually holding weight. The lowering must be done in concert to protect against 'swing' if the rescuer should come off (the rescuer will fall by at least the length of the slack rope in front of the prusik, and will potentially swing by length that the ropes are unequal).

In the case described here, the lowering went smoothly. The belayer working the other rope commented on how we had 'fallen in to a rhythm' occasioned, it seemed, by the satisfying feel and sound of the ropes passing through their respective belay devices 'in sync'. The rescuer was lowered smoothly to the quarry floor by keeping the prusik loose and feeding the rope carefully through the belay device.

## SEEING THE TROUBLE: PART ONE

When a rescuer is lowered in a training scenario they would 'usually' untie from the rope attached to their harness, and walk back around the crag to rejoin the team at the top. This night, it was decided that we would practice belaying the rescuer back up the crag. The crag itself was not a sheer vertical face but a graduated quarry wall. The 'climb' was a very easy scramble with very little risk (and no risk at all of an actual fall), would save considerable time, and would allow for the practicing of an 'unusual' technique (as already noted, a key aspect of mountain rescue training is the ability to be able to adapt key principles of safety to different contexts, rather than simply repeating fixed procedures which may or may not be suitable for a given scenario). The rescuer, note, was being belayed, not 'raised', meaning their weight was not being taken by the rope at any point, but the system was there to protect against a slip turning in to a fall. The operation required the reversal of the process described above; the feeding of the rope back through the belay device, and sliding the prusik in the opposite direction.

Due to numbers present that night, the team were organised such that one rope had two people working it, one moving the prusik back, the other, pulling the rope back through the device. The other rope was manned by one person (both ropes had

effectively become safety ropes at this point, due to not taking any weight). I was operating the left-hand rope alone and it made for awkward work. A method for managing the rope, organised around the importance of avoiding slack and the positioning of the prusik, had to be improvised. There was some display of this awkwardness from myself, communication about it between the team, and moment of pause called by the instructor. Once I had resolved the temporary troubles with working the rope through (my main concern being the *potential* production of 'slack' in the system with the rescuer ascending quicker than I could feed the rope), the brief climb, which in total took no more than a few minutes, resumed and the rescuer arrived at the top of the crag.

That there was trouble of some sort is clear even in this description. That the trouble was available to participants and was 'experienced' as trouble is also sure. Or, at least, you will have to take my word for it, as participant and author. I trust my account of the trouble has been convincing enough. Working that rope back through the belay device and the prusik *was* awkward. And there was that pause where the whole thing stopped, with some sort of work of shared attention and recognition of a resolution before the whole thing could get going again. Beyond that, the testimony of the practitioner is, in this instance, a little unclear. In the current case, however, I was filming at the time, with a GoPro camera mounted on my helmet. And so a video was available for inspection, in order to attempt the recovery of those missing, if not lost, details. I will, for now present transcript and stills here, and perhaps unusually, let them speak for themselves.

1 R: oooh  
 2 B1: okay↑  
 3 B2: doesn't sound too good  
 4 B1: heh  
 5 S: °just stepping over the rope Rob°  
 6 R: [[inaudible]]  
 7 B1: that's always good  
 8 (10) ((B2 steps forward to manage rope))  
 9 B2: u- hhh.  
 10 (4)  
 11 B1: oka:y (.) taking in  
 12 (4)  
 13 B2: yeah that's:  
 14 .hhh  
 15 R: [[inaudible]]  
 16 S: okay [hold there] a moment then D  
 17 B2: [dun really]  
 18 B1: is that coz of the prusik Rob or:  
 19 (1.5)  
 20 B2: hey↑= ((turning to look at B1 and T))  
 21 =>you alright↑< ((T is looking at B2))

22           ...  
 23 B2: >yeah yeah<  
 24       jus[ tryna get a decent technique       ] for it  
 25 B1:       [yeah yeah  
 26 T:       [just trying to sort out the prusik]  
 27       it's very much a two person job  
 28 B2: I think I've err (.)  
 29       botched some sort of method together  
 30 B1: h[eh he       ]  
 31 T:       [he [he       ]  
 32 R:       [okay ] climbing[ again]  
 33 S:                               [okay       ]  
 34 B1: okay

*Excerpt 1: prusik trouble*

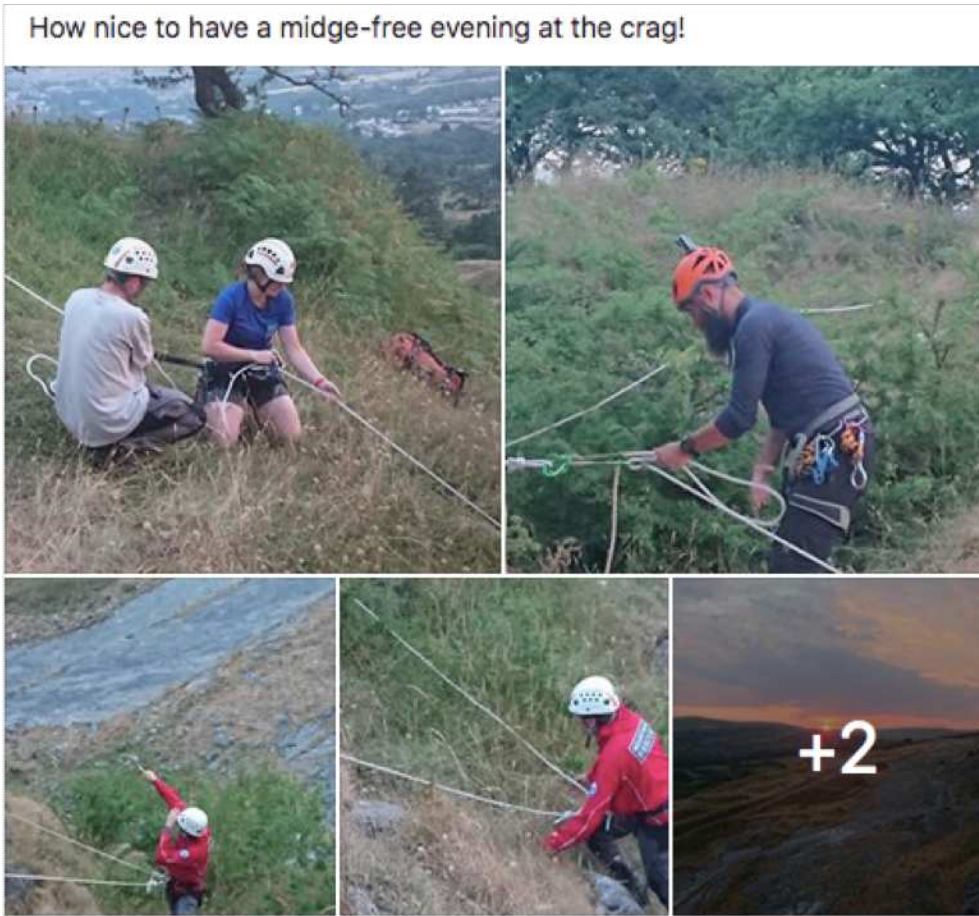
Those familiar with finding lived detail in transcripts will readily see some sort of trouble being oriented to by participants.<sup>5</sup> The sequential emergence of the 'trouble' as oriented to by the team, displayed across the turn organisation, ahead of its direct topicalisation and the activity coming to a halt. The distributed character of that noticing and attention to that trouble displayed through the initial non-lexical display and subsequent verbalisations suggesting 'trouble with the prusik'. The categorial order of the lower, as displayed in procedurally relevant ways—for example, it is the supervisor (edge person), and not the belayer who tells the rescuer to 'hold it there'. It is another senior member (T), who is also 'a belayer', that provides an account of the general trouble with the 'unusual' system we are using that night (l. 26-17), thus locating this event within the mountain rescue context of regular training and past and future events. Here represented in the transcript are something of the details of the event, and of the emergence and apparent resolution of the trouble. Yet, for now, we can leave this analysis before it begins. Something is missing. That there is trouble is clear, but from the transcript alone, what the detail of the trouble that occasions the actions represented in the transcript is not. And, as already discussed, it is not a matter of simply adding the video such that 'we' (as Gods) might see, in the video, what the trouble *really* is. Given that I am a participant, the practitioner, what *is* the 'participant's perspective' in this case?

## SEEING THE TROUBLE: PART TWO

We can begin to explore this accomplishment through other materials produced at the time of the apparent 'prusik trouble'. The senior team member who was acting as 'edge man' was also making still images of the scene, and later that night posted them on the team's private Facebook page.

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<sup>5</sup> R = rescuer, Bx = belayer (I am B2), S = senior team member/edge-man, T = senior team member/instructor.



*Figure 2: A members' record of the evening at the crag*

The images, presented here as they were available in the initial Facebook post, provided for the emergence of a different sense of what the trouble was during the training exercise.

I take it that for the majority of readers, the images above do *not* speak for themselves in terms of seeing trouble in the system or in the procedure followed that evening. Yet very soon after their being posted in the private Facebook group, a senior team member not present that evening, posted the following comment:



*Figure 3: Facebook comment under images*

The post triggered some further discussion, with other members beginning to make their own guesses as to what the problem was. Indeed, the ‘trouble’ was not immediately available to other team members. The senior team member declined to say what the trouble was at that point, indicating it would be discussed in person at training at the weekend. The trouble with the ‘sharing’ can be heard as indexing potential audiences that could potentially see what the senior team member was seeing and that *that* seeing might be cause for some sort of reputational damage to the team.<sup>6</sup> What *was* clear to all was that something was wrong and that that something was available in the images.

Three days later, the team is setting up at the quarries in which we would be training. I was called over by the two senior team members involved in the description above—the member acting as ‘edge-man’ and the member who had recommended caution in sharing the images. The images were presented to me on a smartphone—not formally or in a disciplinary manner, it should be made clear—and I was asked if I could see what was wrong in the picture with me in it. I admitted that I could not, and, assuming the trouble was with the slack in the system, gave an account based on the loop of rope visible, as evidence of the awkwardness of the process and its potential trouble (as described above, rope loops anywhere in the system increase the length of any slip or fall). The senior team member, however, then went on to point out how he thought that the karabiners were interlocked in the image. Interlocked karabiners, whilst not immediately dangerous, introduce a ‘weak link’ to the system. Krabs that are interlinked *can* become dangerous due the potential for ‘cross-loading’ resulting in pressure being placed on the weakest part of the krab—the spring-lock gate.



Figure 4: What the instructor saw

<sup>6</sup> I have, of course, checked with the team that they are happy for me to share it here. As will become clear, the trouble was of a very particular sort and not due to negligence or bad practice.

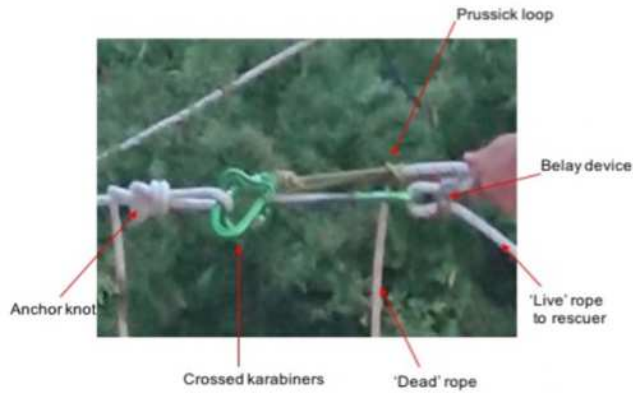


Figure 5: Detail of the 'trouble'

My initial response was one of denial and I offered a 're-interpretation' of the image presented to me. I *know*—as a member—that interlocking krabs are a potential problem in any system. I thought that it was unclear whether the krabs were interlocked or not, and that if they *had* become interlocked then I would (given my theoretical knowledge of that object and its consequence for the system) have acted to remedy it. The senior team member also noted from the images that I was wearing a GoPro fixed to my helmet, and asked me to review the footage to see what had actually happened. What were the details of the event seen through *that* inquiry?

The viewing of the still images by the senior team member, provided not a conclusion, but the beginnings of an inquiry. They were treated as instructable for the viewing of the video which was now made relevant for *that* inquiry—not an unmotivated viewing, but an instructed viewing focused on the krabs. In this way, the still images 'animated' the viewing of the video in a specific way. The inquiry would proceed with the materials to hand, and centre around the possibility of the incident being 'caught on camera'. Any general analytic interest is, at this point, overwritten by the orientation to the specific troubles of the interlocking krabs as a technical object of concern. The particular analytic troubles of the video were not 'discovered' in the field, but were yielded by the field. Once so instructed to view what were my own actions as party to the system, what did the video show?

To no small degree of surprise to me, the participant/practitioner, the video 'revealed' the karabiners interlocking, and not only interlocking but apparently being dealt with by me in the course of handling the rope. The timing of the 'trouble' and its apparent 'resolution' is also closely tied to and displayed in the utterances and pauses of the team, perhaps *this* was the trouble being oriented to by the team and solved by me during that break in the activity:





Figure 6: Handling the trouble

The video, then, not only shows the krabs interlocking, but also apparently shows me ‘fixing’ the issue by pulling the loop of the prusik knot taut, thus removing one krab from the other. This specific trouble and its resolution was absent from my recollection and ethnographic description of the incident. What to make of this? Had I simply ‘forgotten’? Was I ‘unaware’? Were the team as a congregation all ‘unaware’ of that specific trouble and dealing only with a generality, produced in their sequential actions? It is, after all, the trouble with the *prusik* not the krabs that is verbally topicalised by the team on the hill. Is what was ‘hidden’ now revealed? That is a tempting proposition. Yet, how are we to say that the ‘real’ nature of the trouble was ‘hidden’ from those involved in its very production? What were the details that were relevant for the parties involved in managing that trouble?



## THE TROUBLE WITH DETAIL

The fieldnotes in this case, would not do. The trouble had only been available as a generality, an awkwardness. Yet, it seems that is how the trouble was available to the system's congregation. In a similar sense, the photographs and video did not just make more detail available to the analyst (and here, I include the post-hoc analysis of the senior team member), it made available detail that may or may not have been available to the parties to the scene in the course of their actions. Indeed, as Garfinkel (1967: 101) observed, the photographs and the video viewed in the context of the inquiry, might be considered as a *phase-of-the-action*. A phase-of-the-action? *Not* a record of an action, but part of the unfolding inquiry in deciding what trouble those materials could come to.

The danger with the view from the video is the temptation of reducing the analysis to the re-description of what is observably the case in the data, without the elements or 'machinery' (Sacks, 1995) in and through which those data come to be sensible. To access just those elements of and methods for social order we cannot look to the video or the transcript alone in the hope of having what the members are doing revealed to us (Mair et al, 2013). Indeed, consider viewing the video without any of the surrounding commentary or context. The temptation to produce an analysis of the event, focused on the interactional detail that produces 'the trouble', which is then solved by the krabs being 'intentionally' disentangled, by a 'knowing' individual might prove too much. That's if the krabs' interlocking was visible at all. At the same time, it is a mistake to reduce the doing of fieldwork and ethnography to the production of fieldnotes alone. There is order at all points, yes, but that order is endogenous. It is *a local cohort's order* and it belongs, if it belongs to anybody or anything, to the *setting*. To see *that* sort of detail we need the ethnography.

For the team, what the inquiry could come to is the trouble with the krabs. Not in terms of a revelation produced in the detail of what was seen or not seen at the worksite, but as a 'learning' to be noted and institutionalised. What is not available in the transcript, or the video, and what I have 'held back' from the discussion thus far is that the krabs are not 'standard' krabs. They form part of my personal kit. 'Personal kit' and 'team kit' is a hugely important distinction in technical mountain rescue work. The activity we were practicing is a 'personal lower'—'personal kit' is acceptable for use in training activities and, possibly, in very unusual circumstances if team members were in a 'live' situation without 'team kit' available. In full and 'live' rescue scenarios, 'team kit' is to be used. Whilst there are requirements for personal kit of the sort I mentioned above (minimum strength ratings for krabs, for example, as well as regular inspection, care taken with maintenance and storage and so on), 'team kit' is uniform and formally and consistently inspected and maintained. The green krabs used in this case are a particular type, and a particular shape—a 'boa', popular for climbing rope work, and particularly good for belaying and anchors requiring wide angles between ropes—and so the investigation was concerned with the appropriateness of *those* krabs as part of the system described above. I did not use them again, at that point in the system. The investigation,

then, became something of what Garfinkel (2002) describes in the second, stronger, sense of unique adequacy, in which the concerns of the analyst-as-member and the members' themselves are aligned in discovering what their *shared* concerns are, and what they may learn as a consequence. The trivial but apparent 'prusik trouble' becomes 'krab trouble', or, rather trouble in which *those* krabs are discovered to be problematic.<sup>7</sup>

The deviant status of the krabs (rather than the unusual system, my competency, and so on), once seen, is what the investigation can come to. And this is significant for the context of the production and ongoing, and in this case *post hoc*, accountability of the assembled *system* as comprised of component parts with predicates and positions and sequential consequences and so on that is operated not by individuals but members in the fullest sense. You need to be a member to see any of this in the video. What the case also might show is how that gloss of 'membership' and perhaps also of 'unique adequacy' might warrant further specification. What was seen immediately in those still images was seen by a particular *category* of member, and the seeing as an activity *displayed* that category status. It was ultimately the senior team member's viewing of the video, in *that* context, that was significant for the inquiry, for the production of the krabs as a 'work object', and for the 'framing' of what the trouble was. 'Competency' is not something possessed but displayed, in action, and in multiple tasks, and is an 'outcome' or 'by-product' as Sacks might say, not a 'driver' of action. There was more to say about what was viewable in the video from the members' perspective. They too were interested in the detail of that pause and the coordination of activity around it. The pause, instead of being taken as *evidence* of some sort of trouble for the team, instead becomes a phenomenon—their phenomenon—and was treated as a good demonstration of the sorts of coordination between team members that arises from good 'situational awareness'. There was no sense that anything had been 'missed' by the team members on the hill. There was enough detail oriented to for the trouble-for-all-practical-purposes to have been handled well, in a coordinated manner, thus displaying the congregation as a team.

We arrive, here, back at that issue of detail, and enough detail, and the haecceity thereof. The tent of formal analysis is pitched on the ground of local practices, but it is supported by the notion that those practices are not grounds for adequately describing the ways in which social organisation is possible. Yet, what we find in these materials, and the other aligned studies mentioned, are evidence, if you will, of the ways that the details of the scene are empirically adequate for the order of the scene and for members' practical purposes. Whilst the participants might be said to have 'missed' the detail of the trouble (the interlocking krabs) that were 'seen' first by the camera, then by the senior instructor, then in the video, the trouble was adequately specified and oriented to *as* trouble *within that scene*. Whatsoever we might call the trouble, the krabs serve as a gloss for whatever the trouble needed to come to in the operation of the system, for *that* congregation. In 'revealing' the krab trouble—which was there all along—the still images

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, my own files of the incident were labelled as 'prusik trouble', as is, I have realised, the title of the draft file as I finalise this article: 'The important words were the titles that were assigned to a text to recover that text as the title's explication' (Garfinkel, 1967: 100).

animate the video, and the video animates the trouble in a specific way, organised, as phases-of-action of the inquiry in producing a version of events that arrives back at those images posted on the team's page. The 'trouble' that was momentary for the activity and its staff on that Thursday night, and forgettable in its fine detail for being so, takes on an institutional significance. The 'so what?', then, is some insight in to the ways in which materials are constituted as practically adequate *in use*. Attention to the processual and radically local accomplishment of the 'participant's perspective' as displayed in the viewing of materials such as these, perhaps enables some purchase on how that 'perspective' is categorially organised, and differentiated, and is itself an emergent property of the scene. Perhaps this is not 'news', but 'the members' perspective' routinely serves as a gloss for a gamut of epistemic and reasoning practices that are inspectable and themselves good grounds for inquiry. They are also, at once, the grounds upon which we can trace the accomplishment of phenomena as a members' concern. And that, we might say, is good enough for a good ethnographic description.

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